

Leinster SHC Semi-finals

# Kilkenny's fortress opens up and swallows Wexford

Nowlan Park sits back and enjoys another ruthless display from Cats  
Haul of 3-5 for debutant Aylward looks ominous for pretenders to crown

**Kilkenny 5-25**  
**Wexford 0-16**



**Keith Duggan**  
at Nowlan Park

The longest day of the year arrived and for the Wexford hurlers it contained the longest hour of their lives.

Best-laid plans are often vapourised in the Marble County but nothing could have prepared Liam Dunne's players for this excoriating experience.

The guests were heading for the exits and the south before the hour mark in Nowlan Park yesterday as the All-Ireland champions opened their campaign wearing the familiar cloak of splendour and intensity. This was a harrowing afternoon for the Model County.

Five goals gave Kilkenny such a cushion that Brian Cody was able to call two-thirds of his fullback line ashore with 10 minutes remaining, by which time the game was reduced to a succession of fabulous scores by the home team.

Much of that scoring damage was finished by Glenmore's debut man Ger Aylward, who scooped an absurd 3-5 from play on his championship start, joining the long list of players who thank Brian Cody for their chance with glittering opening-day turns. Aylward has been working diligently in the shadows for three seasons waiting for this chance and was predictably modest about his haul afterwards, leaving it to the boss to assess.

**Decent game**

"Ger had a decent game, there is no doubt about that," Cody said. "It is up to himself now to drive things forward again."

In keeping with the theme of last season, Richie Hogan's fingerprints were all over this performance. The Danesfort man is an impossibly busy bundle of brilliance and he was completely on his game here, always taking the right option, always moving into space, scoring the first Kilkenny goal and setting up a further two.

Wexford's ambitions of unsettling Kilkenny with the simple plan of direct ball into their big forward unit never materialised. Kilkenny never allowed it to, pressing Wexford's delivery relentlessly and forcing them into errors which were, as always, punished.

It didn't take long before the Wexford men found themselves in a maelstrom familiar to most teams visiting Nowlan Park. They began their day on a blistering positive note when Ian Byrne fired a confident point after just 17 seconds. On the way into the ground, the vis-



**Kilkenny's Ger Aylward, who scooped 3-5 in total, celebrates scoring his side's fourth goal at Nowlan Park.**

PHOTOGRAPH: JAMES GROMBIE/INPHO

**By the numbers**

Kilkenny	Wexford
<b>SCORES</b>	
5-25 (40)	0-16
<b>FROM PLAY</b>	
4-20	0-7
<b>FROM PLACED BALLS</b>	
1-5	0-9
<b>WIDES</b>	
8	12
<b>65s</b>	
2	1
<b>FREES CONCEDED</b>	
8	16
<b>YELLOW CARDS</b>	
0	1
<b>RED CARDS</b>	
0	0
<b>ATTENDANCE</b>	
	19,134

iting supporters were talking about the possibility of a good show and just maybe a surprise: they were daring to hope. The teams traded points for five minutes and then a sliver of a goal chance opened up for Byrne but Wexford couldn't exploit it.

Two minutes later, Kilkenny struck, with big Michael Fennelly squaring a ball for Hogan to bat in from close range. Liam Dunne's men were still absorbing the after-effects when TJ Reid and Eoin Larkin clipped smartly taken points.

The Wexford defence looked anxious now and Kilkenny implemented their stress test, with Fennelly and Hogan creating a chance for Aylward to goal on his debut even as referee Dermot Kirwan played advantage.

It all looked familiar now, with Hogan snapping up possession from Fennelly's hook to strike a beautiful point from midfield. After 14 minutes, Kilkenny had registered 2-4 from play - and into a strong breeze. Welcome to Nowlan Park.

**Soaring point**

And yet for all that, Wexford stayed with them on the scoreboard. During Kilkenny's rampant period, the match took on a Lee-Chin-Against-the-World aspect: the Faythe man was immense through that turbulent period but a soaring point from Andrew Shore settled the others down as they sought to deliver high ball for Conor McDonald and Liam Og McGovern.

Seven frees from Byrne kept them in contention but the Kilkenny goal threat remained a live proposition all through. In

65 but Wexford were able to point to the mere seven points that Kilkenny scored in the first half for encouragement.

They trailed by 3-7 to 0-10 at the break.

Minutes before that, during a lull in the crowd of 19,134, David Redmond could be heard urging his team-mates to keep going. It was a heartening battle cry. But 15 minutes into the second half, the scene was unrecognisable. The counties were hurling in different realms. Playing with the breeze now, Kilkenny slipped into a rhythm of play and the scores began to whistle over from all angles.

**Ruthlessly finished**

Aylward's second goal was an absolute killer, ruthlessly finished after Kilkenny tidily worked the ball along the touch line from Holden through to Reid. Aylward's third was the result of a second's hesitation from Cianan Kenny and Andrew Shore and the new man was through again.

Kilkenny were four clear goals ahead after 50 minutes and Wexford faced the demoralising prospect of fresh stripy battalions coming in, eager to stake their claim. They kept battling and landed an occasional score but it was a deluge of scores for the Nowlan Park faithful, who are accustomed to being spoilt, to enjoy.

Kilkenny's eternal summer shows little sign of ending. So far so good for the post-Shefflin era of Kilkenny hurling.

Byrne missed the resultant

**KILKENNY:** 1E Murphy, 2P Murphy, 3J Holden, 4J Tyrrell, 5P Walsh, 6K Joyce, 7C Buckley (0-1), 8M Fennelly (0-1), 9C Fogarty, 10W Walsh, 11R Hogan (1-5), 22J Power (0-2), 13G Aylward (3-5), 14T Reid (1-7, pen, 65, 3 frees), 15E Larkin (0-3), Subs: 25K Kelly (0-1) for J Power (67 mins), 17S Prendergast for Tyrrell (59 mins), 19R Lennon for P Murphy (59 mins), 24M Kelly for E Larkin (63 mins).  
**WEXFORD:** 1M Fanning, 7C Kenny, 2L Ryan, 4E Moore, 6L Chin, 3M O'Hanlon, 5A Shore (0-1), 11D Waters, 8D Redmond (0-2), 12I Byrne (0-1), 9 frees, 10S Tomkins, 9D O'Keefe, 13P Morris, 14C McDonald, 15L Og McGovern (0-2), Subs: 20Foley for 13P Morris (18 mins blood), 17A Nolan for E Moore (32 mins), 21P Doran for Waters, 19H Kehoe for S Tomkins (half-time), 18E Martin for A Shore (6 mins), 25G Sinnott for McGovern (65 mins).  
Referee: D Kirwan (Cork).

**Reaction**

**'Kilkenny were very good on the day and we had no answer'**

**KEITH DUGGAN**  
at Nowlan Park

"We were fierce unlucky, weren't we," said Liam Dunne, calling on the black humour which has sustained Wexford hurling on days like this. A rough week for the Wexford manager didn't get any brighter in Nowlan Park.

Confirmation that Dunne had dropped Jack Guiney from the panel for disciplinary reasons did not make for perfect preparation but it is hard to imagine any one player could have significantly altered this result. Kilkenny had too much everywhere.

"The door would be open to Martin Storey today," Dunne said when asked if there was a chance that Guiney might return in the coming weeks.

"You want your best players all the time and the player in question has the potential to be one of the best players in Ireland, let alone Wexford. But you have to treat everyone the same and you have to make decisions and tough calls. I am just hoping that the short-term pain for that player will be a long-term gain for Wexford."

This result leaves all of Wexford hurling with short-term pain to cope with.

"We expected a lot of ourselves. We felt we were very well prepared. But obviously

some things weren't right. Kilkenny were very good on the day and we had no answer to them. You could see that the players' heads dropped.

Kilkenny were magnificent at creating space for themselves and their top players were on form today and when



**"You have to make decisions and tough calls. I am just hoping that the short-term pain for that player will be a long-term gain for Wexford"**

they hit the ground running, you are in trouble."

Ger Aylward stopped on his way back from collecting his first man of the match award. "First championship, yeah," he confirmed. "It is hard to get in there but thank God I got a chance. It went well and hopefully push on for the next day."

# Galway gathering momentum

Tribesmen follow up their dismissal of Dublin with a ruthless demolition of Laois

**Galway 3-28**  
**Laois 1-14**

Anthony Cunningham described the performance as adequate but it was enough for Galway to canter towards their pre-season target of a Leinster final.

The Tribesmen scored 1-16 in the last 18 minutes of the opening period and kept Laois scoreless to put this one to bed. Having been level at 0-2 each when playing with a strong wind, they were in cruise control in the second half.

"We're in the Leinster final where we wanted to be" said the Galway manager. "We gathered back there last November and July 5 was etched in our minds ever since. We know the battle it's going to be in two weeks' time and we're

cellent points. Purcell was outstanding throughout and was unlucky not to get a goal with his eighth-minute shot.

Once Coen found the net at the other end though, it was plain sailing for Galway as they rampaged through their shellshocked opponents.

Laois were more competitive in the second half with the wind behind them but Galway were always comfortable.

**The spirit**

Stephen Maher's goal reduced the margin to 15 points but Galway were quick to respond with Canning goaling in the 49th minute, showing tremendous strength to outfield Matthew Whelan and finishing from close range.

Glennon came on to score 1-2. Laois showed the spirit that has defined them since Plunkett took over three years ago, with Purcell, Zane Keenan, Joe Campion and Ma-



**Galway's John Hanbury is tackled by Laois's Zane Keenan at O'Connor Park in Tullamore.**

just delighted to get over today. We probably thought it would be a bit closer, to be honest, but we performed adequately.

"It was quite congested for the first quarter and it took us a while to find our range ... they crowded it well and with the breeze there it was going to take time."

**Crafted glory**

They found the solution though the goal that opened the floodgates was hardly a crafted glory, as Johnny Coen let fly from more than 90m. Laois goalkeeper, Eoin Reilly either lost sight of the sliotar or misjudged its flight as it ended in the net and it was a calamity from which Séamus 'Cheddar' Plunkett's crew never recovered.

"We just didn't fire up and give the performance that we expected of ourselves and that we wanted to give to the supporters" said Plunkett.

"I'm absolutely convinced of the character that is in this team and I'm looking forward to bouncing back again the next day."

Joe Canning scored 1-15 in a commanding all-round performance. He notched up 1-4 from play but his general contribution was excellent.

Laois had started so well, with Paddy Purcell and Tommy Fitzgerald scoring two ex-

her all adding points, but Canning was flawless from frees. With Glennon and Pádraig Brehony also on the mark, the margin stretched to 23.

Laois finished with three points, including two from substitute Paddy Whelan and they will comfort themselves moving into the qualifiers with the fact that they were the equal of Galway for three quarters of the game.

Unfortunately for them, the one in which they were blown away came before half time.

It showed what Galway are capable of and on the back of their Dublin demolition, suggests that they might be serious contenders once more.

**By the numbers**

Galway	Laois
<b>SCORES</b>	
3-28 (37)	1-14 (17)
<b>FROM PLAY</b>	
3-17	1-9
<b>FROM PLACED BALLS</b>	
0-11	0-5
<b>WIDES</b>	
14	14
<b>45s</b>	
3	2
<b>FREES CONCEDED</b>	
15	13
<b>YELLOW CARDS</b>	
4	1
<b>RED CARDS</b>	
0	0
<b>ATTENDANCE</b>	
	8,802

**GALWAY:** C Callanan, J Hanbury (0-1), J Coen (1-0), P Mannion (0-2), Daithí Burke, T Tannian, D Collins, A Smith (0-2), A Harte, David Burke (0-2), C Donnellan, J Gynin, C Mannion (0-1), J Canning (1-15 (0-9fs, 265s), W Healy (0-2), Subs: P Brehony for Harte (12-14), D Glennon (1-2) for Healy (4-0), J Cooney for Donnellan (4-8), Brehony (0-1) for Harte (5-2), G McInerney for Collins (5-6), F Moore for C Mannion (6-1).  
**LAOIS:** E Reilly, B Stapleton, M Whelan, C Healy, T Delaney, J Fitzpatrick, J A Delaney, J Campion (0-1), P Purcell (0-3), S Maher (1-1), T Fitzgerald (0-1), D Palmer, W Hyland, Z Keenan (0-5 (3fs, 265s), C Dwyer (0-1), Subs: P Whelan for T Delaney (blood (34-ht), P Whelan (0-2) for J A Delaney (4-7), N Foley for Campion (5-6), B Conroy for Fitzgerald (6-4).  
Referee: F Hogan (Tipperary)

# September Road

**Eamon Donoghue**

Surprises welcome but shouldn't be such rare events

It was great to get surprises, at last, in this summer's senior football championship on Saturday.

Sligo's upset against high-flying Roscommon in the Connacht semi-final, and before that Antrim's dramatic qualifier win over Laois represented the first times so far this year a team defeated a side from a league division higher than their own.

Albeit Roscommon are now Division Two league champions and what not, but a team such as theirs being overturned by the likes of Sligo, in the heat of championship, shouldn't be such a rare event.

Nor should dramatic, underdog comeback wins such as Antrim's on



Saturday against Laois. Isn't this what the championship is all about?

Last summer then Division two side Louth had overturned top-flight Westmeath as early as the Leinster preliminary rounds. Would you call that an upset though? Teams defeated those from a

higher division on 11 occasions with the first 'major' upset coming on this weekend 12 months ago, when Longford shocked Derry.

Two years ago it was far more lively, London had beaten Sligo in the Connacht championship by May 26th, with Wicklow also securing a win in the Leinster preliminary round. This year we're now left with little to be excited about ahead of the provincial climaxes.

The last Connacht team to claim the Nestor Cup and not be in Division One was Roscommon in 2010; in Leinster it was Meath in 2009. We have a reminder, now it's time to rediscover that 'anything can happen in championship' belief.



# O'Shea weighs in on doping debate

There weren't too many players voicing their anger over the two-year suspension of a Monaghan footballer for doping last week. The player in question had never played either a senior county league or championship game, and was involved in the squad on a trial basis when tested.

Mayo midfielder Aidan O'Shea, though, was far from happy about the suspension. Having initially tweeted "2 year ban from his hobby? #joke" O'Shea quickly found himself in a debate.

"As an intercounty player we are aware of all the rules he was in the panel for a short period and was dropped" he told his social media following. And when asked if it's right to have double-standards for club and county players, he was quick to reply "well then support club players the same as county players?"

"He was totally wrong to be doping no doubt! Are club players aware of the sports council doping regulations?"

# Aylward joins ranks of Kilkenny 'unknowns' to star on debut

In the aftermath of Wexford's 24-point defeat to Kilkenny comes the ready-made question - was Liam Dunne right to drop Jack Guiney.

The Model County managed just 0-7 from play, 0-4 coming from their forward line. If ever you were in doubt over Guiney's talent, he hit 4-5 (4-4 from play) for his club last Thursday night.

In truth though his availability wouldn't have made up that 24-point difference, but for a typically united bunch who appeared void of any belief or much motivation, how much of a distraction did mid-week developments prove?

For Kilkenny, the game saw the unveiling of their latest young prodigy - but who is Ger Aylward and what makes him special?

The corner-forward's return of 3-5 from play on his first championship start, meant that he followed Walter Walsh and the long list of Kilkenny players to go from zero to hero following shock championship starts.

A minor All-Ireland winner in 2010, he boasts frightening pace and a raft of other physical attributes, gifted perhaps by his experiences with a bigger ball. The former Good Council pupil, like last year's Kilkenny minor captain and current pupil Darragh Joyce (on Tadhg Kennedy's AFL radar), dispels the notion that there are no footballers in Kilkenny.

In 2009 Aylward lit up the senior college's football championship. Alongside him was Walsh. Six years on and they're showing why they chose hurling.